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JOINT RESOLUTION MEMORIALIZING THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS TO ALLOCATE FULL FUNDING FOR THE NATIONAL VETERINARY MEDICAL SERVICES ACT

WE, your Memorialists, the Members of the One Hundred and Twenty-fourth Legislature of the State of Maine now assembled in the First Regular Session, most respectfully present and petition the President of the United States and the United States Congress as follows:

WHEREAS, the State of Maine and the United States are currently experiencing a shortage of food animal veterinarians in rural agricultural areas, in certain population groups and in certain disciplines, such as public health, regulatory veterinary medicine and diagnostic laboratory medicine; and

WHEREAS, the financial constraints of servicing debt loads averaging \$120,000 for veterinarian graduates in 2008 resulting in loan repayment obligations approaching \$1,381 per month, assuming a standard interest rate and a standard 10-year repayment term, prevent many new veterinary school graduates from choosing to work in underserved areas and disciplines; and

WHEREAS, the shortage of food animal veterinarians has critical homeland security ramifications since these individuals act as "agricultural first responders" in the early detection of foreign animal diseases, and the early detection of these diseases is of utmost importance in limiting widespread dissemination of these potentially devastating diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease and avian influenza, known as "bird flu"; and

WHEREAS, a food animal veterinary needs assessment commissioned by the Maine Veterinary Medical Association in 2007 has identified many underserved geographic areas for food animal veterinary services in Maine; and

WHEREAS, the food animal veterinary needs assessment identified student loan repayment as the primary obstacle to recent graduates deciding to enter food animal veterinary practice; and

WHEREAS, an adequate supply of food animal veterinarians is a key component in the continued assurance of a safe, wholesome food supply, in the prevention of foreign animal disease incursions and in monitoring and reporting diseases of human health concern; and

WHEREAS, the National Veterinary Medical Services Act, which passed in the United States Senate by unanimous consent in November 2003 and was signed by former President George W. Bush on December 6, 2003, authorized "such sums as necessary" to provide student loan repayment to veterinary school graduates who agree to work in underserved areas, has not been fully implemented by the United States Department of Agriculture; and

WHEREAS, funding of this important Act has the potential to alleviate the food animal veterinary shortage and stimulate small business growth in the State of Maine and in the Nation; now, therefore be it

HP0273, LD 8888, item 1, 124th Maine State Legislature
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RESOLVED: That We, your Memorialists, respectfully urge and request that all steps be taken to allocate full funding for the National Veterinary Medical Services Act as part of the 2009 economic stimulus plan; and be it further

RESOLVED: That suitable copies of this resolution, duly authenticated by the Secretary of State, be transmitted to the Honorable Barack H. Obama, President of the United States, to the President of the United States Senate, to the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives and to each Member of the Maine Congressional Delegation.